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**College of Education**

# **American Dream in Fitzgerald's "The Great Gatsby"**

**Research project**

Submitted to the department of (English Language) in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of B.A in (Literature)

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## Dedication

*I gratefully dedicate this paper to my loving parents , for their endless guidance and support and to my friends for their inspiring piece of advice Above all , to Allah Almighty who always gives us strength ,knowledge and wisdom in everything I do*

## Acknowledgements

*First and foremost, praises and thanks to the God , the Almighty, for his showers of blessings throughout my research work to complete the research successfully, I would like to express my deep and sincere gratitude to our research supervisor M. Bukhari for giving me the opportunity to do research and providing invaluable guidance throughout this research. I am extremely grateful to my parents for their love, prayers , caring and sacrifices for educating and preparing me for my future*

## **Abstract**

This writing is mainly intended to reveal the aspects American dreams in Scott Fitzgerald's novel "The Great Gatsby". The stressed aspects are Pursuit of happiness, Persistence, Self-reliance, Individualistic, and The way to wealth. This is a qualitative research. This tries to describe the aspects of American Dream in The Great Gatsby by using sociological approach. The assumption of that dream leads to studying the values of American Dream as reflected in The Great Gatsby. The result of this research shows that, The Great Gatsby, a novel written by F. Scott Fitzgerald reflect the aspects of American Dream such as pursuit of happiness, persistence, self-reliance, the way to wealth, and individualistic.

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## **Section One**

### **Modernism**

Broadly speaking, 'modernism' might be said to have been characterised by a deliberate and often radical shift away from tradition, and consequently by the use of new and innovative forms of expression. Thus, many styles in art and literature from the late 19th and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries are markedly different from those that preceded them. The term 'modernism' generally covers the creative output of artists and thinkers who saw 'traditional' approaches to the arts, architecture, literature, religion, social organisation (and even life itself) had become outdated in light of the new economic, social and political circumstances of a by now fully industrialised society. Amid rapid social change and significant developments in science (including the social sciences), modernists found themselves alienated from what might be termed Victorian morality and convention. (Kuiper,2016).

They duly set about searching for radical responses to the radical changes occurring around them, affirming mankind's power to shape and influence his environment through experimentation, technology and scientific advancement, while identifying potential obstacles to 'progress' in all aspects of existence in order to replace them with updated new alternatives. All the enduring certainties of Enlightenment thinking, and the heretofore unquestioned existence of an all-seeing, all-powerful 'Creator' figure, were high on the modernists' list of dogmas that were now to be challenged, or subverted, perhaps rejected altogether, or, at the very least, reflected upon from a fresh new 'modernist' perspective. Not that modernism categorically defied religion or eschewed all the beliefs and ideas associated with the Enlightenment; it would be more accurate to view modernism as a tendency to question, and strive for alternatives to, the convictions of the preceding age. The past was now to be seen and treated as different from the modern era, and its axioms and undisputed authorities held up for revision and enquiry. The extent to which modernism is open to diverse

interpretations, and even rife with apparent paradoxes and contradictions, is perhaps illustrated by the uneasy juxtaposition of the viewpoints declared by two of modernist poetry's most celebrated and emblematic poets: while Ezra Pound (1885-1972) was making his famous call to "make it new", his contemporary T. S. Eliot (1888- 1965) was stressing the indispensable nature of tradition in art, insisting upon the artist's responsibility to engage with tradition. Indeed, the overtly complex, contradictory character of modernism is summed up by Peter Childs, who identifies "paradoxical if not opposed trends towards revolutionary and reactionary positions, fear of the new and delight at the disappearance of the old, nihilism and fanatical enthusiasm, creativity and despair" (Day, 2000).

## Section Two

### Modern Age and the Concept of American Dream

#### 2.1. Novel in the Modern Age

The novel has always been modern always concerned mainly Age & novel with contemporary life, and, as the name suggests, always after the new thing. But some time around 1900 (or 1910, or 1922), to be modern meant something more, because suddenly modernity meant everything. It seemed to break the world in two, snapping all continuities with the past, putting human character and life itself into a state of constant change. To keep up, the novel also had to snap and to split - to change. And so it became "the modern novel," breaking with the past, making itself new, to pursue modernity into the future.

On the other hand, Modernist literature was largely an entity of fiction writing which was popular approximately between the 1910s and the 1960s. Modernist literature came into vogue due to the presentation of realism of increasing industrialization and globalization and their consequences on the human life. Scientific advancement, new technology and the violent events of both World Wars put the people of the world amid the uncertainty of the human existence. Writers skilfully responded to this question by turning toward Modernist views. Modernist fiction spoke of the inner self and perception. The writers perceived decline of the Western civilization, instead of progress. The modernist writers saw the bleak reality of the modern civilisation leading to human alienation. They saw cold machinery and increased capitalism, which alienated the individual and led to loneliness ( Miss Ekta N Patel,2019 ).

Scholars of modernism will, of course, find much here that is familiar. Matz rehearses accounts of modernism ranging from old saws of the Paul Fussell variety—"These fragments bespeak a broken culture—a disintegration caused by modern war and anarchy, destructive to the modern mind" (40)—to views based on such theoretical

concepts as primitivism, Shklovskian defamiliarization, and Bakhtinian heteroglossia.<sup>2</sup> But academic readers should come to this book looking not mainly for new insights but for a useful classroom text. By this standard, the book's introduction and first five chapters, which take serious fiction from James up to World War II, are at least as good as anything I have seen at laying out fundamental building blocks for an initial understanding of modernism, among them the meaning of "modernity" as we routinely employ it, the turn towards "consciousness" as a primary subject of fiction, the sense that experiments in form are necessary to represent a fundamentally altered world, and the particular kinds of narrative revisions and games that result. Volumes such as the *Cambridge Companion to Modernism* or Blackwell's own *A Concise Companion to Modernism* provide greater specificity and a more complex, problematized vision of modernism, but at the cost of blurring the large outlines, the "bold and plain lines" that may be most useful to undergraduates. (Collier,2007)

## **2.2.American Dream**

The American dream is the belief that anyone, regardless of where they were born or what class they were born into, can attain their own version of success in a society in which upward mobility is possible for everyone. The American dream is believed to be achieved through sacrifice, risk-taking, and hard work, rather than by chance.

The term American Dream is often traced back to James Truslow Adams, a historian and author. In 1931, as Americans suffered through the Great Depression, Adams wrote a book called *The Epic of America* in which he spoke of "a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement... regardless of fortuitous circumstances of birth or position." In the beginning, the American Dream simply promised a country in which people had the chance to work their way up through their own labor and ingenuity. Immigrants fled the entrenched class restrictions of their homelands for the United States in the hope of obtaining land and gaining religious and other freedoms.

Revolutionaries fled England in search of freedom. This promise of a better life attracted people from all over the world to the United States. They came to America ready to work hard.

Colonial America saw the dream realized in the interaction among classes. People of the time wrote about the new experience of equality. Employees could speak openly to their employers and believed that with dedication they could improve their status. During westward expansion, the American Dream led many to race for land and live rugged lives on the frontier. By nature of their hard work, they could set down roots on a piece of the expansive land open to homesteaders and pioneers. This idea of the American Dream was rather competitive and individualistic—people fought others to own a piece of land for themselves.(Lin,2021)

In the early twentieth century, Americans discovered a shared dream in which citizens worked together to make life better for the American masses. Franklin Delano

Roosevelt's (FDR's) New Deal programs promised safe, healthy futures for every American—a new understanding of the American Dream. Many people who encouraged Americans to get involved in World War II did so believing that people all over the world deserved their chance to realize the American Dream. Participating in the war allowed Americans to put their national concept of idealism on display for the world. Americans fighting in the war were fighting for the preservation of the American Dream, which was summed up by FDR as the possession of four essential freedoms: freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom from want, and freedom from fear. People who could feed their families, keep them safe, worship as they pleased, and say how they felt were living the American Dream, he said. After World War II, men returned from the war with a new American Dream in mind. Americans fantasized about homes filled with happy families who vacationed every summer. Veterans used the GI Bill to obtain low-interest mortgages on homes, resulting in a building boom and the creation of suburbs across the United States.

The American Dream became closely tied to home ownership, and the American marketplace filled up with products to help improve life at home. The American Dream transformed into an ideal that relied on people being able to afford all the modern accessories: cars, television sets, and college educations for one's children. Television Greatly helped define the American Dream as the acquisition of material goods. Americans dreamed of living ideal lives like those portrayed in shows such as *Leave It to Beaver* and *Father Knows Best*. Many Americans fueled their purchase of the new American Dream with credit cards, a choice that eventually affected the state of the American Dream.(Lin,Ibid)

It is clear that *The Great Gatsby* was written during the years in which the 20th century really began. The old world had died in the First World War<sup>1</sup>, and a new one was being shaped: by the energy and freedom of free market capitalism, rapidly increasing populations and Great leaps forward in technology and in the availability and quantity of consumer goods; and by the energy and freedom released by the breakdown of

traditional hierarchies and the emergence of a hedonist, youth-oriented "pop culture" centred on jazz music, parties and sexual liberation. Fitzgerald defined this energy in his 1931 essay *Echoes of the Jazz Age* as "all the nervous energy stored up and unexpended in the War"<sup>2</sup>. This energy was spent on hedonism rather than social activism. As he wrote in 1931, "the events of 1919 left us cynical rather than revolutionary. It was characteristic of the Jazz Age that it had no interest in politics at all. (Patrick Charles,1995,p14)

## Section Three

### Fitzgerald's Biography and Works

#### 3.1. Fitzgerald's Biography

Francis Scott Key Fitzgerald was one of the most important American writers of the early 20th century. He is best remembered for his novels which describe life in the American 'Jazz Age' – the 1920s. He is also remembered for his rather tragic life and early death. (Tim Xu,2009)

F. Scott Fitzgerald grew up in Minnesota, attended a few private schools (where his performance was mediocre), and went to Princeton University. In 1917, Princeton put Fitzgerald on academic probation. He enlisted in the Army. On base in Alabama in 1918, he met and fell in love with Zelda Sayre, who refused to marry him unless he could support her. He returned to New York to pursue fame and fortune. The publication of his first novel, *This Side of Paradise*, in 1920, made Fitzgerald a literary star. He married Zelda one week later. In 1924, the couple moved to Paris, where Fitzgerald began work on *The Great Gatsby*. Though now considered his masterpiece, the novel sold only modestly. The Fitzgeralds returned to the United States in 1927. Fitzgerald published several more novels, including *Tender is the Night* (1933), but none matched the success of his first. Deep in debt because of their ritzy lifestyle, the Fitzgeralds began to spiral into alcoholism and mental illness. Fitzgerald died of a heart attack on December 21, 1940. Zelda died eight years later in a fire. (litcharts,2020)

In 1922 Fitzgerald published *The Beautiful and the Damned*. This novel delineated the self-indulgence and destruction of Anthony and Gloria Patch and was based on the lives of Fitzgerald and Zelda, who were known for their glamorous and "unsettled" lives. (Dr.Rose,2017)

Two collections of short stories - *Flappers and Philosophers* (1920) and *Tales of the Jazz Age* (1922) were his next publications. They were judged harshly by critics, motivating Fitzgerald to redirect his efforts.

Published in 1925, *The Great Gatsby* is frequently nominated as "the Great American novel".

A quintessential story of not only the 1920s but also of the American experience, the novel chronicles the exuberance, as well as the malaise of the decade, showing how America's fascination with material success was eroding values.

### **3.2. Works by F. Scott Fitzgerald**

*This Side of Paradise*, 1920.

*Flappers and Philosophers*, 1920.

*The Beautiful and the Damned*, 1922.

*Tales of the Jazz Age*, 1922.

*The Vegetable*, 1923.

*The Great Gatsby*, 1925.

*All The Sad Young Men*, 1926.

*Tender is the Night*, 1934.

*Taps at Reveille*, 1935.

*The Last Tycoon*, 1941.

*The Crack Up*, 1945. (Harold Bloom, 2006)

## Section four

### American Dream in The Great Gatsby

#### 4.1. An over view of The Great Gatsby:

There is no doubt that *The Great Gatsby* is Fitzgerald's most popular work due to its complexity yet ability to entertain. The novel is Fitzgerald's most complicated and sophisticated piece of writing and clearly offers readers the climax to the erosion of the American dream as seen through the eyes of Fitzgerald. He "draws a number of antithetical relations between the idealism and visionary self-aspirations of the mythic American West and the sham and vulgar materialism of the civilized present symbolically signified by the modern wasteland of the urban industrial East" (Greasley 200).

With seamless easiness, Fitzgerald captures America and specifically New York of the 1920s, when life was lived at a faster pace. Fitzgerald created the masterpiece when he was just twenty-eight, continues to live on, as mesmerising now as it was when it first appeared, a unique and dazzling jewel and one that Maxwell Perkins thought "an extraordinary book, suggestive of all sorts of thoughts and moods".<sup>2</sup> Perkins added one comment, which has struck everyone who has read the novel and which surely must account for its endless and concentrated power: It seems in reading a much shorter book than it is, but it carries the mind through a series of experiences that one would think would require a book of three times its length.

As an attempt of any artist in a given society, F. Scott Fitzgerald endeavours via the most of his creative works to convey the predominant mood in America of 1920s. He portrays the hysterical atmosphere, the political corruption and the social problems to enrich his writing, but as a man of good breeding inherited from father he accomplishes everything skilfully. This good upbringing pushes him to defy and mock

at the immorality of the golden age. To realise such a Great purpose and to break with the realistic novel, F. Scott Fitzgerald used some devise and tactics that are called the aspects of Modernism. (Miss Ekta N Patel,2019,p244

Claiming Greatness of theme for The Great Gatsby it can be justified on the ground that it animates not only the American past and present but which also has the power of myth to convey meaning independent of time, place and the particulars of the narrative. Various critics like Robert Ornstein, Edwin Fussel, Marius Bewley and John Bicknell have paid significant attention to different aspects of the novel. Robert Ornstein claims that the critics emphasized the novel's dramatization —of the betrayal of the native American dream in a corrupt society.. Ornstein writes:

I would agree that in Gatsby Fitzgerald did create a myth with the imaginative sweep of America's historical adventure across an untamed continent. But his fable of East and West is little concerned with twentiethcentury materialism and moral anarchy, for its theme is the unending quest of the romantic dream, which is forever betrayed in fact and yet redeemed in men's minds .... Yet once, Fitzgerald suggests, there had been opportunity commensurate with aspiration, an unexplored and unexploited frontier where Great fortunes had been made or at least romantically stolen. And out of the shifting of opportunities from the West to Wall Street, hecreates an American fable which redeems as well as explains romantic failure." (Miss Ekta N Patel,2019,p244)"

## **4.2. Decline of the American Dream in "The Great Gatsby"**

The Roaring years show that there was no any golden rule for the accomplishment of the American dream. Every man has just to work hard enough for his success, even if he is not part of a rich family or a high social class. Roland Marchand (1986) claims, "Not only did he flourish in the fast-paced, modern urban milieu of skyscrapers, taxicabs, and pleasureseeking crowds, but he proclaimed himself an expert on the latest crazes in fashion, contemporary lingo, and popular pastimes." The definition on his book for the man of 1920's attaining the American dream is quite similar with the way Fitzgerald portrays the figure of Gatsby from the lower class to a luxury life. Jay Gatsby is the embodiment of the self-made success who invented a new identity for himself regardless the poor past. The richness and the social status of him are the factors that cause the death of the American dream.

An American of that time was considered wealthy according the material wealthy and how much is he able to spend. The sizes of the houses described in the novel are the main element that indicates the status of someone. At the first sight, it seems like Gatsby has everything of the American dream, but he still asks for Nick's assertion as it is shown in chapter 5: "My house looks well doesn't it? See how the whole front of it catches the light." (p. 87) Donaldson (2001) explains in his article: "The culture of consumption on exhibit in *The Great Gatsby* was made possible by the growth of a leisure class in early-twentieth-century America. As the novel demonstrates, this development subverted the foundations of the Protestant ethic, replacing the values of hard work and thrifty abstinence with a show of luxury and idleness. Donaldson explicates how hard work and social values lost their importance and are replaced by laziness.( Zamira Hodo,2017,p303)

"The Great Gatsby" represents characters that are interested in materialistic life and never get interested in working hard. One of the reasons why Gatsby loves Daisy may be her aristocracy origin. He was not able to understand that money is not enough to

win Daisy's love. In the other hand, Tom is as wealthy as Jay but he uses a careful and fine way to show off his fortune.

Gatsby tried to have everything for show such as: the big house, the beautiful swimming pool and the generous parties. Donaldson (2001) comments upon this: "The outsized house, together with the lavish parties and the garish clothing, the automobiles and the aquaplane, represent his attempt to establish himself as somebody, or at least not nobody."

The partygoers were striving for the American dream but they couldn't realize that Gatsby who had all this fortune has not achieved yet the real American dream. All of them think that he has a perfect life but he needs Daisy to enjoy the luxury life at all. Gatsby thinks that he has to "establish himself as somebody" for the achievement of the American dream. After the meeting with Daisy, he understands that their relationship was not as beautiful as before. This is the moment when his life starts to downfall. He decided to live alone without the servants and lost the desire for the Saturday's parties. That happened because of his wrong conception of being "somebody" for the sake of love. The automobiles are one of the most obvious elements of the novel too.

The twenties were the years when the cars, as a new technology, characterized the high class Americans. They do not consider the cars as a way of transportation but as a possibility to exhibit their fortune to the society. The protagonist has employed a personal chauffeur but he himself has an expensive yellow car. In her article, Lauraleigh O'Meara highlights the significance of cars at 1920. She describes Gatsby's car as "...a rich cream color, bright with nickel, swollen here and there in its monstrous length with triumphant hatboxes and supper-boxes and tool boxes, and terraced with a labyrinth of windshields that mirrored a dozen suns. Gatsby's 'splendid car' delineates an expensive and unique commodity, not an efficient means for travel" .( Zamira Hodo,2017,p304)

## Conclusion

The story of *The Great Gatsby* revolves around the failure of the American dream. Gatsby was poor, a social notion that put him out of the question of gaining Daisy's hand in marriage. Then he got rich, tried to achieve the American dream by doing illegal businesses in order to set himself on the pedestal of 'a rich man marrying a rich woman' in order to justify his love. Though Daisy Buchanan and Jay Gatsby come from very different backgrounds, they are similar because they are both addicted to achievement: their unrealistic expectations and constant need to look to the future prevents them from ever being happy.

Using the characters Fitzgerald shows the reader how the American dream can never make anyone happy because the person will always just want more. The author is portraying that to be happy, people cannot have boundless goals, but instead need to learn to appreciate the present, rather than obsess on how Great the future will be. The American dream is shown with the characters of Gatsby and Myrtle. Both the characters come from a low-income family and wish to live their American dream by accumulating wealth. They move to every length to fulfil their dream. Gatsby follows the life of illegal stores while Myrtle becomes a mistress to a wealthy man, Tom. Both their ambitions come to life, but their lives are ultimately shallow and incompetent. Their lives are short-lived, as both are killed soon after they acquire wealth and fame. The novel's main message is that shortcuts cannot fulfil the American dream, but it needs hard work.

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